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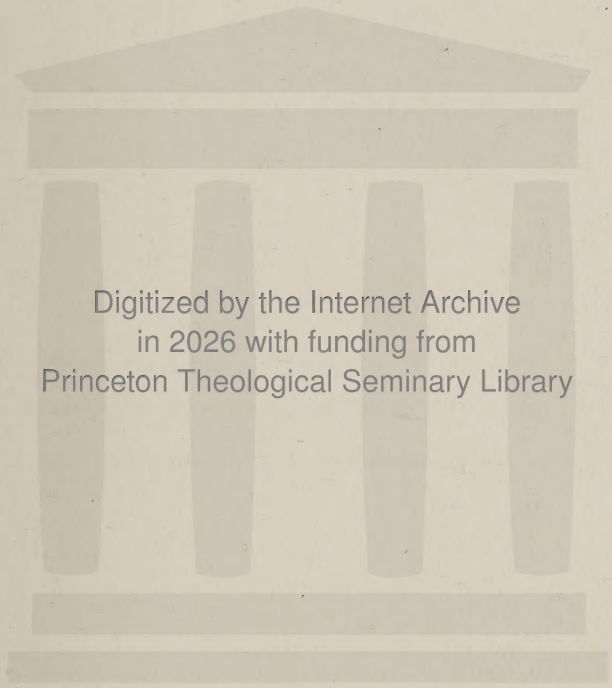
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OUR LAST SYNOD

AND

THE LAST OF OUR THEOLOGICAL HALL

BY THE

REV. JOHN ROBSON, D.D.

SENIOR MINISTER OF ST. NICHOLAS UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ABERDEEN

AND EX-MODERATOR OF UNITED PRESBYTERIAN SYNOD

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TO

MY WIFE

PREFACE

THIS little book, as may be judged from its title, is meant primarily for United Presbyterians. It consists of the Sermon and Address given at the opening of the Synod of 1900, the last regular Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, and of the Address given at the close of the Theological Hall the same year—the last meeting of the Hall as such. They are now printed in response to the request of a number of those who heard them, and who desired to have them in a permanent form.

Principal Rainy, in his speech in the Free Assembly, deprecated speaking of the *last*

Assembly of the Free Church and the *last* Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, as they would both be continued in the United Assembly. He is correct in so far as the substance is concerned, but not in so far as the form is concerned. Forms change while the substance remains, and the forms come to be dear to those accustomed to them, and their passing cannot be witnessed without a longing regret. But behind that regret there is a permanent joy in the conviction that the abiding substance is clothing itself in new forms, which will give it freer scope for the great work it has to do.

J. R.

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OUR LAST SYNOD

OUR LAST SYNOD

A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, Edinburgh, 7th May 1900.

"Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."—HEB. xii. 26.

"YET once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." So spake God; and, fathers and brethren, God is shaking us. We have been feeling the tremors, and now we have to face the removing of those things that are shaken. As we meet to-day is not the thought uppermost in our hearts, the word oftenest on our lips—This is our last Synod?

This Synod, which has been the heart of our Church—fulfilling a function such as no other ecclesiastical assembly in Scotland has done, gathering together all the ministers of

the Church every year, drawing strength from all the congregations of the Church and sending in return an impulse to them—will not meet again save to merge itself in a larger assembly. And the various societies that cluster round it, that draw their life from it, and in turn help to stimulate its life; the social gatherings that have kept alive old friendships, and helped to maintain the bond of interest in the Church's work, must all pass, and can at best but survive in other forms. And beyond the Synod, in our Theological Hall, in Presbyteries, even in congregations, changes must be looked for, which will cause many a pang.

We cannot think on the removing of "our pleasant things" without sadness, such as the Hebrews, to whom this epistle was written, felt at the laying waste of those pleasant things in which they and their fathers had delighted. But for us, as for them, there remains the consolation that the things which are shaken are removed in order that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. If we turn our eyes

from the changes that are occurring around us to the unchanging Kingdom to which we belong, our sadness will give place to triumphant joy. Let us look first at that Kingdom, let us realise our place in it; and we may look with quietness and confidence at all changes that threaten us.

And we shall best realise the place of that Kingdom in the world, and our place in it, if we look at its ideal and aim. It is Salvation: salvation of the individual, salvation of the community, salvation of the world. And what do we mean by salvation? Is it not just deliverance from death and everything that leads to it, and bringing into life and everything that conduces to it? It means delivering the individual soul from unbelief, from obedience to sin, from living for self, into faith in God, obedience to His law, living for others. It means the deliverance of the community from bad laws, bad customs, everything that hinders social progress and purity;

and the bringing in of righteous laws, healthy customs, everything that will help social progress and purity. It means for the world overthrowing every form of religion which cherishes darkness, oppression, unrighteousness; and the bringing in of the faith of Jesus Christ, with the freedom, the security, the justice, and the elevation of life's ideal, which flow from it.

This may seem an aim which it is hopeless to seek, but the Kingdom will continue till it has been attained. It is a Kingdom that cannot be moved. It rests on the being of the eternal God Himself. It has been established on earth on a sure foundation, by the agony, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension to the right hand of power of Jesus Christ. He must reign till all His enemies are put under His feet.

This Kingdom we have received. It is not a Kingdom external to us, but one in which we have to serve—one in which we are united with the great King Himself in the responsi-

bility of administering and spreading it, as well as in the triumphs which it achieves.

It is for this Kingdom that our Church exists, for its sake that we are members of that Church. Various subordinate motives may have helped to determine our connection with it, but the supreme motive, or what should be the supreme motive, for our connection with the United Presbyterian Church is, that it is doing the work of the Kingdom of God, and that we, as its members, are united with that Kingdom, carrying on its work, and advancing its triumph. Loyalty to our Church is for us the practical expression of loyalty to the Kingdom of God.

But the Church has human elements in it, which may come to hinder instead of helping the true work of the Kingdom. Elements that were once a strength may come to be an embarrassment and a weakness. Then to work out His purpose of salvation the word of the Eternal is again heard, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."

In this prophecy "the earth" is generally interpreted to signify the nations of the world, and "heaven" the visible Kingdom of God on earth: the kingdom of Israel under the Old Economy, and the Christian Church under the New. It is most frequently in consequence of upheavals among earthly powers that the shaking in the spiritual power becomes needful, to enable it to meet the new responsibilities laid on it. For centuries before this epistle was written upheavals had been taking place in the kingdoms of the world, resulting in the establishment of the Roman Empire. The Jewish Church was quite inadequate to meet the requirements of the Kingdom of God under the new conditions. Hence it was shaken and removed.

I

We need only to look around us to see how God has been shaking the earth, what changes have been taking place, and if we look at them we may enter into the purpose of God in

shaking our Church. We can see the shaking in our own Land, in the Empire, in the World.

There has been a shaking in our own Land. Just look at what has been accomplished by the one factor, steam, with the facilities for travelling and for production which it has brought. In the time of our fathers the distinction between the town and country was known; but there was an equipoise between the two. There was a growth in the population of both, and the problem of the town was not so very different from that of the country. How all that is now changed I need not dwell on. Concentration has been found to be profitable. Industries that used to employ a large part of the village population are driven out of the field by the larger industries of the cities, and the population they used to support has disappeared. Even in agriculture we see the same process in a modified degree: large farms supplanting small farms, the steam plough and the reaping machine thinning

down the labourers. So there has come to be a shifting of population from the country to the towns and cities.

And with this have come all the terrible problems of city life, the crowding of men together in conditions disastrous alike to health, to morals, to religion.

"There a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead.
There the smouldering fires of fever creep along the rotted floor,
And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor."

And amid such surroundings a new democracy is rising up which is becoming conscious of its powers, and is seeking to deal with these problems in its own way, setting aside the Christian solution as out of date. Among the classes there is developing selfishness, a mad haste to pile up riches, the spirit of gambling, and of speculation which is little better than gambling, love of pleasure, indifference to the claims of the masses. And both rich and poor are more and more ignoring the claims of religion and of God, in a way that

bodes the gravest consequences for the future.

Looking at all this it is hard to believe that ever we shall see the purity, the temperance, the righteousness, the goodwill, the charity, which should rule and beautify human society, so triumphant in our land, that they will bring brightness and beauty into the dark slums, will weld together classes in mutual respect, and establish the love of God and man as the supreme law. We may work for this end, we may seek to fall back on what is good in human nature, and hope that it will expel the ill. But with all that, it would be impossible to look at what has to be done without absolute despair; until we remember that—

"Behind the dark unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

Yes, when we think of God we feel strong for the work. It is the work of His Kingdom, that Kingdom which cannot be moved, that

Kingdom whose final triumph has been secured by the passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in which we are fellow-workers with Him, and for which He equips us with His Holy Spirit. Thus God has been shaking the nation, and through it His Kingdom is advancing to conquer.

Then there has been a shaking in the Empire. The same causes that have been at work producing changes in the nation have been at work on a larger scale in the Empire. The impulse that is driving the population from the country to the town is driving it forth from the land to seek wider scope in lands not yet occupied. Within the past half-century new nations have sprung up in Canada, in Australia, in New Zealand; and we can see the process of these being consolidated into one great empire. That seems likely to be one result of the terrible war which is now being waged, which is bringing its lessons to the Church as well as to the nation.

"And the land had rest forty years"—such is the record we meet once and again in the history of Israel, after the record of some sore oppression and war by which deliverance was wrought. Forty years—the time that could be allowed to pass till evils became so great that the stern purgation of war was needed to root them out. And this has been the experience of our own land during the past century. From the close of the great Napoleonic struggle at the beginning of the century, to the outbreak of the Crimean War followed by the Indian Mutiny, the land had rest forty years. Again from the close of the struggles of the Indian Mutiny to the outbreak of the war in South Africa, the land had rest forty years. Several wars there were, important wars, but none which disturbed the "rest" of the land. And evils were beginning to pervade society and to corrupt the nation. Arrogant self-sufficiency, reckless forgetfulness of God, contempt for the rights and opinions of others, were aggravating evils at which I

have already glanced. As a Church we had conference after conference on the state of religion and morals in the country, that made us feel our own impotence, and cry to God to arise and plead His own cause in our land. And by "terrible things in righteousness didst Thou answer us, O God of our Salvation." By the slaughter of the flower of our youth in battle, by reverses of our armies before their foes, by the bitterness of national humiliation in the eyes of the world, the nation was brought to its knees, and was shaken out of its overweening confidence. Then in a truer spirit its manhood arose to meet the crisis. In the spirit of loyal devotion to duty, of self-sacrifice for their country, of readiness to venture their lives for a cause that they believed to be just, our young men have gone forth to war; and the nation, chastened by the discipline through which God has brought it, is watching how they bear themselves. There have indeed been scenes of violence since success began to crown our arms, ruffianly

attempts to suppress freedom of speech, and, still more humiliating, a condoning of these in quarters in which better things might have been expected. But let us trust that these are passing insanities which will be reprobated by the sense of the nation.

And let us trust also, that, as God's people, we shall not be deaf to the call God is addressing to us through these great events. We may in them see the development of a great divine purpose. The struggle at the beginning of the century threatened our existence as a nation, and we emerged from it stronger and more powerful as a nation than ever before. The conflict in the middle of the century threatened our Indian Empire, and it left that empire more firmly established than ever. The conflict in which we are now engaged seemed at one time to threaten our Colonial Empire, and already it has been the means of welding it together into a solidarity that few could have dreamed of a few years ago.

I do not discuss the question of Imperialism,

or the rights or wrongs of the present war. Whatever views we may hold on these, we may not shut our eyes to the fact that God in His providence is giving our race "a goodly heritage," an empire such as the world has never seen before, an empire in which free nations are being bound together by kinship, by common ideals, by loyalty to one another. And how do we, as citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom, look on this glorious heritage of our earthly citizenship? Is it not with the desire that all who share the earthly heritage may share the heavenly also?—that in all the free nations under the British Empire, the Christian spirit shall rule as it does in this land at its best, strengthening the individual life sanctifying home life, purifying and inspiring public life? That is the ideal which, as God's people, we seek, and which, we believe, it is God's purpose, amid all the changes that are taking place, to accomplish, and to accomplish through us. When we think of the vast work that is to be done, of the constantly swelling popula-

tions that have to be provided with the means of grace, of the wide tracts of territory over which they are spreading, we may feel that the task is beyond us. But the work is the work of God's Kingdom; it must be done, and if we are faithful in doing our part our labour cannot be in vain.

Then there is the shaking that is taking place in the World. It is an expansion of that which is taking place in the Nation and in the Empire. Other nations, impelled by an emulation of ours, are seeking to found world empires, to possess lands in which the surplus of their population may settle, or in which they may find a market for their industrial products. It seems now to be taken as an axiom by the nations of Europe that the world is to be parcelled out among them, and that the only consideration that should prevent any one of them appropriating any part of it, is that it has already been appropriated by another Power. Thus it has come to pass that the

barriers between the different nations of the world are being shaken and thrown down; one land after another that used to be shut off from Christendom has been opened up. Here again I do not judge the spirit that has led to such results. Much of it we must condemn, but God has been overruling it, causing the wrath of man to praise Him, and has opened up the way for the preaching of the Gospel as it never was before.

And amid all this, the Divine Kingdom has continued silently and steadily to make progress, and it is calling on us as its children to press on its conquest, to enter all the lands that are opened up, to overthrow the idolatries and false faiths that hold them in bondage, and to establish in them the faith of Jesus Christ, with all its benevolent and elevating power. Here again the work to human eye seems hopeless, but here again we must remember that the work is the work of God's Kingdom, and that, if we are faithful in it, we cannot be without our reward.

II

From this wide survey of the shaking of the Nation, the Empire, and the World, and the work which the Kingdom of Heaven has to accomplish in them, we come back to the changes before us in our own Church. At first we may not think that they are in any way connected with those great imperial and world upheavals that I have been trying to sketch. On the one hand it may seem to be too small to be of account in these world movements, and on the other to be in too different a sphere to be connected with them. But there is a connection in the purpose of God. He says, "I will shake not the earth only, but also heaven"; and He shakes both for the same purpose. It is the same God that rules the Nations and who rules the Church; that overrules the passions and policies of the peoples to shake the former, and the aspirations and convictions, and errors even it may be, of its members to shake the latter. He does both

to work out one great redemptive purpose for the human race. And we shall never realise His purpose for us, unless we look at it in view of the great changes He is working in the world.

Let us look at our work in the Nation. Our Church took its rise in a past century, when a totally different state of affairs prevailed. The strength of our Church was at first in the smaller towns and in the country districts. Its aim was not so much to evangelise these districts as to supply means of grace to devout men and women, who were dissatisfied with the lifeless ministrations then prevalent in the Church of Scotland. So it planted churches in many outlying districts, that were good centres for the work it had to do. These were long the strength of our denomination, and are so still, in the fact that they supply many of their staunchest members to our city churches. But with the revival of evangelical religion in the land, the planting of churches

of other denominations, and the diminishing of the population, we cannot but feel that mental and spiritual power is wasted in these small places that might be more profitably employed in meeting the wants of our larger and increasing populations. So long as we exist as a separate denomination we feel bound to maintain these causes that have been and are our strength. No true servant will doubt that he is bound to serve God's Kingdom by seeking the interests of the denomination to which he belongs. It is the means by which God has appointed him to serve His Kingdom. Loyalty to it is loyalty to the Kingdom of God; and thus it may come to pass that very loyalty to the Kingdom of God may stand in the way of the true interests of that Kingdom. Then it is that God shakes heaven, shakes us in our Church connection, shakes us out of those associations that trammelled us, puts us into a position where the interest of the denomination coincides with that of the Kingdom, and the strengthening of the one means the

strengthening of the other; and the one as well as the other requires that we withdraw surplus energy from thinly peopled districts, to concentrate it on those vast populations where the want is so clamant. It is not merely that some cases will be adjusted, but that the whole outlook of the Church will be enlarged, and the spirit in which it works will be broadened. We shall realise, as we never have before, the burden of the lapsed and lapsing masses, and the power God has given us to bear it; and shall address ourselves with fresh hope and fresh enthusiasm to the work.

And the same spirit will also, we may trust, be extended to the Church's work in the Empire. Not more earnestly do our fellow-subjects in South Africa look to us for help in the struggle in which they are engaged, than our fellow-Christians in all the Colonies look to the Churches of Great Britain for help in the struggle in which they are engaged, of meeting the spiritual needs of the new territories that

are continually being opened up. After all deductions for the needs of our own land, there is a surplus power, of which the natural outlet is our growing Colonies. It seems strange that, while these vast fields are open, so many of our young men should be content to hang on for years on the chance of getting some small opening in this country. Good work for the Master, needful work for the Church is no doubt to be done there. But what is that compared with the magnificent work of moulding the character and destiny of these rising nations, of securing them for Christ, of making them a power for the Kingdom of God? The fault is not so much in the young men, as in the Church system which trains them to look on themselves as trained for the Denomination, rather than for the whole field. I trust that with the enlargement of our home sphere there will come a wider sense of responsibility, that the imperial spirit which has taken hold of the nation will, in its spiritual counterpart, take hold of the Church, and that among her young

men, as among those of the nation, there will be an emulation to go "to the front."

And the same impulse will, we may trust, be felt further in the Church's work in the world. Here we come on the great question of missions. We have an honourable record as a missionary Church, but I trust that it will have no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth, in the enlarged sphere to which we look forward. The position of the Church at the close of this century is in some respects not unlike that at the close of last century. The Christian conscience had then outrun the Churches. Missionary work was then carried on by societies independent of them. Now we have recognised that the Church is the true missionary society, and these old societies have been absorbed in it. But has not Christian enthusiasm again outrun the Churches? In societies such as the China Inland Mission, and others, we see outlets for missionary enthusiasm such as the Churches have not yet provided, and methods

of work such as the Churches have not yet recognised. Let us trust that God is bringing on us the changes that are coming to quicken the conscience of the Church, to combine all that is effective in the methods of these societies with all that is effective in her own methods, and that the result will be conquests for the Cross among the heathen such as the world has not yet seen.

Thus we see that in our own land, in the empire, in the world, avenues of service are being opened up, which only through the changes that are before us, and the wider power they will give, we could hope worthily to enter on. If they involve the removing of some things that have been dear to us, shall we not even rejoice in the sacrifices we are called to make? All the more that, if God has been shaking us, it has not been from without, but from within, by the stirring of His Spirit within us, urging us to go forward at whatever cost, to accomplish the great purposes He has in

store for His Kingdom in the world. We may trust that the inspiration of God, which is compelling us to shake off old limitations, will strengthen us in the more ample field into which He is guiding us.

We hear it said, there is no enthusiasm for the Union. That is partially true. Two reasons may be assigned for this. The first is that our horizon has been too limited. If we look only at our United Presbyterian Church, we shall feel no enthusiasm. If we look even at the greater Church of which we hope to form a part, we shall feel no enthusiasm. But if we look at the "Kingdom that cannot be moved," if we look at the spread of Christ's Kingdom throughout the earth, and all that the Union may mean for that, we shall eagerly look for its consummation, and pray fervently that the Holy Spirit may so fill us, that we shall not fail to rise to the high service to which it calls us. When we think of what union with the great Free Church means, the uniting of our

traditions with its traditions, of our spirit with its spirit, of our life with its life; when we think of the power that it will make us in the Kingdom of God, do not our hearts spring forward to it with a hope that makes us forget the sorrow of what we may have to lose?

It will not accomplish everything. A wider union must be consummated before Scotland can take the place it should in the great work of evangelising the world. It may be that there is a lack of enthusiasm in some measure just because of this sense of incompleteness in the coming Union. But we may only move step by step as God opens up to us the way, content if He, whose years are throughout all generations, gives us in our generation to see one great step towards the far-off divine event to which we move. Our children will, we trust, see greater things than we do. It may be that some of you young men will be spared to see the wider union, to which this one near at hand is the necessary step; and will be able then to thank

God for what He is now doing, with clearer apprehension of the way by which He has been leading His Church.

And if we may believe that our children shall see greater things than we can see, we hope to see what our fathers desired to see, but saw not. A second reason for the absence of enthusiasm is that we have not had to fight for Union. Our fathers fought for it thirty years ago. The obstacles that baffled them have passed, we have only had to arrange for the consummation. To us the Master is saying, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured and ye are entered into their labours." And there is the want of enthusiasm for that which has not called forth effort and sacrifice. If we could realise the bitter disappointment of those who fought for the Union in our own Church and in the Free Church when they saw their efforts baffled, if we could serve ourselves heirs to all the agony of their labours, if we could behold them a cloud

of witnesses around us, we would feel all the triumph of a victory not less crowning because so long delayed.

My mind reverts especially to the opening of the Synod of 1873, when negotiations for Union were for the time abandoned. The sermon was preached by one who had been in labours more abundant than any other in the cause of Union, and of whom it may be said, as was said of old of another hero of the faith, that the work he did in his death, was more than all that he did for this end in his life—John Cairns. He preached from the words, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that when ye have done the will of God, ye may inherit the promise." I remember the inspiring assurance with which he called on the Church not to be despondent though the cause of Union seemed to have failed, but to be confident that, if we had patience, God would bring it about in His own time and in His own way. He has passed from earth without having

received the promise ; most of those who fought with him have likewise passed. "These all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

RETIRING ADDRESS

RETIRING ADDRESS

At Same Synod.

FATHERS AND BRETHREN,—Before resigning the charge which you entrusted to me a year ago in calling me to this chair, let me again thank you for the honour which you thereby conferred on me, and for the uniform kindness and forbearance shown me in my efforts to discharge the duties thereby laid on me, whether presiding in this court, or responding to the calls for service in the months that have elapsed since we separated. To the best of my ability I have sought to meet all claims, and if I have had to decline many invitations, it is because I could not be in two places at once. I have during the year had the full share of work that usually falls

to the Moderator, and it has been for me a very pleasant experience. I have renewed many old friendships and formed many new ones; I have come to know the United Presbyterian Church, its ministers, its manses, its congregations, as I have never done before, and I have thereby been led to have an even higher esteem and greater admiration for it than ever. I have seen something of the faithful and earnest work which its ministers, ay, and its members too, are doing, alike in remote country districts amid many discouragements, and in the great populations of our cities, where the work is overwhelming. Our Church is doing a great work for the Kingdom of God in this land, and will carry a great power for that Kingdom into the larger Church, in which it will soon be merged.

One main incident of the year has been the breaking out of the war in South Africa. Its first stages were marked by reverses that

brought mourning and humiliation to the nation. At the solicitation of one of the sessions of the Church, I took a step for which I am not aware that I had a precedent, inviting the ministers of the Church to set apart a certain Sabbath as a day of humiliation and prayer. It was my desire and purpose to act in this with the co-operation of the Moderators of the Established and Free Churches, so that in all our churches one day might be set apart. But circumstances interfered to prevent this being attained; so I invited the ministers of our own Church to observe the day suggested by the Evangelical Alliance. From many of my brethren I have received letters of thanks for the invitation thus addressed to them. This suggests a want in our constitution.[1] We have no recognised authority for calling the Church to united action in cases where that is desir-

[1] This is a defect which in the United Free Church, according to its proposed constitution, will be even more prominent than in the United Presbyterian Church.

able, but which are not sufficiently important to warrant the summoning of the Synod. Presbyteries may, of course, take action within their own bounds; but when it is a question of national importance, it is better that the Church as a whole should move; and it might be understood that the Moderator, in conjunction, perhaps, with the Clerks, should have power to initiate such action.

This year has brought its tale of changes. We have listened with reverent interest to the roll of those whom death has removed from us. I cannot refer to them all, but to one I must give more than a passing word. I have had the singular and sorrowful experience, during my year of moderatorship, of having an esteemed colleague settled, and removed by death. The name of James G. Walton, B.D., is known and honoured in this Church. It was a great joy to me when, in September last, he was settled as my colleague and successor. I felt confidence in the future

of the congregation under his cultured and faithful ministry. I do not think that there were ever two colleagues who had seen less of each other, or who had more confidence in and affection for one another. But, just as we were looking forward to some years of mutually helpful friendship, the prospect was closed by the death, not of him who had laid down the charge, and whose years of service seemed to have passed, but of him who had taken it up, and before whom there seemed opening up a vista of wide usefulness and service. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

I do not forget that, in all probability, this is the last time that a Moderator of the United Presbyterian Synod will give up his charge to it. My successor will, we hope, give up his charge to the larger Assembly to which he will lead us. It is, however, hardly the time to say much regarding the history which is drawing to a close. We have borne our

share, along with other Churches, in doing the work of God's Kingdom in Scotland, and in extending it abroad; and especially in this latter sphere have we to thank God for the way in which He has opened up work for us, and for the blessing He has given on that work. If there is one note in our Church's history that has been more distinctive of it than of any other—I refer especially to our history since we became the United Presbyterian Church, fifty-three years ago—I would say that it has been the practical working out of the great principle enunciated by Ebenezer Erskine in the historic sermon that was the occasion of the first Secession: the Church of Christ is "the freest of all Societies." We have maintained Christian freedom in harmony with Christian obedience. We have maintained that the Church of Christ should be free from State support, as well as from State control; while we have also maintained that State and Church alike should be subject to the law of God. We have led the way

in affirming and in exercising the freedom of the Church to revise the form of sound words handed down by the fathers, so as to make it express better the living faith of the present generation, while maintaining the supreme and infallible authority of the Word of God;—the freedom of Christian congregations to use in the worship of God hymns inspired by Christian faith, while retaining in their place the psalms sung in Zion of old;—the freedom of believers under the New Covenant to use instruments of music to aid the praise of God's house, as did believers under the Old, while maintaining that the essential of all true praise is the praise of the heart. To have led the way in these things, while faithfully seeking to do all essential work, is an honourable record for our Church, an obligation which we have conferred on the sister Churches of the land. We have not been called to contend for them with the same strenuousness and at the same sacrifice as were our fathers for the testimony they had to bear, but we

have shown that we are the heirs of their spirit, and are carrying out their work in the altered circumstances of the times. As we contemplate the close of the separate career of that Church which has been so dear to us, may we not, while conscious of many failures and shortcomings, hear the Master saying, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things"?

MAGIC AND SPIRITUALITY IN RELIGION

MAGIC AND SPIRITUALITY IN RELIGION

Being the Address given at the close of the United Presbyterian Theological Hall, Edinburgh, 18th April 1900.

MAGIC may be defined as the power or supposed power to make spirits subject to the human will by means of spells. There are various forms which magic assumes, but this definition covers them all.

Some forms of magic seem akin to science: modes of controlling natural forces rather than mere spirits; but there is always this radical distinction, that science depends on the recognition and application of the powers of nature, and magic on their subordination to the will of the performer. A scientific result may appear magical to the uninitiated, but that is because

laws of nature unknown to them have been called into play. Other forms of magic are supposed to deal with human subjects, bringing their will under the power of a spell, so that they cannot but do what the master of the spell requires of them.[1]

The fundamental idea of magic, however, is the subjection to the human spell of superhuman spirits, by whom all magical results are supposed to be produced. Within certain limits there is nothing necessarily irreligious in this, and, as we shall see, belief in it may co-exist with a strong spiritual religion. It would be hard to prove, that if such means are really within the reach of man, they were not meant for his use, if put to a good purpose. We can scarcely realise the state of public feeling in Scotland two centuries ago, which allowed, nay demanded, the burning of witches for curing persons of grievous diseases.

[1] This is, of course, different from hypnotism, which has a quasi-scientific basis.

The fact that magic means the control of spirits through spells, shows how it may come to trench on religion. If the spirit so controlled be the object of worship, the whole aspect of religion is changed. The will of the Deity is no longer free, but is subject to the person holding the requisite spell. He can no longer deal with man according to His own pleasure, but only according to the requirements of the spell employed. From the nature of the subject dealt with, it is of course impossible to verify the results claimed for religious magic. To be assured of them there must be faith, but, in this case, it is faith in the spell of the magician, not faith in God.

Here we touch on a question which profoundly affects all religion—whether the human will can move the Divine will. That is one of the postulates of prayer. And there are some who say, that to suppose that prayer can move God, is to make religion magical.

Let us look at this objection, for it will show us the difference between Magic and Spirituality in religion.

Religion and magic both rest on the same basis—belief in the Supernatural. Religion assumes that man is subject to the Supernatural; magic that the Supernatural may be made subject to man. The former is the true basis of religion, and gives it its spiritual character. When magic intrudes into religion, it makes even the Deity subject to man. When religion is spiritual, it recognises the sovereignty and freedom of the Deity. He may be influenced by man, but only as a free spirit can be. In this we cannot get beyond the analogy of the human will. There is, we have seen, a kind of magic which claims to subject the human will by means of spells. Our absolute disbelief in this does not affect our belief in the power of one man to influence another by entreaty, by argument, or by other means which deal with him as a free agent. So, too, the denial that

the Divine will may be bound by spells, does not affect the belief that it may be influenced by prayer, obedience, anything that leaves it free and sovereign in action. In the sequel, I use the word Magic to express the view that the Divine will may be made subject to human spells; and Spirituality, the view that the Divine will is free and sovereign, and can be influenced only as a free spirit.

It is obvious that here we have a question quite different from the theology or ethics of religion. A religion may present a low view of what we are to believe concerning God, and of the duty He requires of us, and yet leave God the free sovereign Ruler, between whom and His creatures no pretence of a controlling power can come. It may be defective or erroneous, but entirely spiritual. On the other hand, a religion may present a high view of God and of His law, and yet, in some of its developments, at all events,

may present God as so subject to human will, as to weaken His power and degrade His law. It may be true in its theology and morality, but may be magical.

Spirituality seems to be the natural as well as true condition of religion; and the question is, How does religion come to be magical? This opens up a wide field of historical investigation, a study of evolution, on which I cannot enter. I will merely indicate the process as it appears in religions whose history may be traced.

The first element in working the change is just the struggle of the flesh against the spirit, which produces informal magic. Here is the process: one man of spiritual insight realises something of what is required in the worship of God, and approaches Him with prayers and hymns that express true devotion. Those in immediate touch with Him use these hymns and prayers in true spiritual worship, but as His direct influence passes, they come to be used as mere forms. The less the

spirit is felt, the more heed is given to the letter. Formalism is practically the first stage of magical religion.

Then comes the second stage. The language in which these prayers and hymns are composed becomes obsolete, but they are still repeated without any apprehension of their meaning, as something which the Deity requires to please Him. The prayer becomes a spell, the hymn a charm; religion becomes magical. As yet, however, it is only informal magic: the change is only in the mind of the worshipper, not in the form and teaching of the religion.

Finally comes the stage of formal magic, almost uniformly connected with the presence of a recognised priesthood. It is formally taught that the repetition of these spells, as they are now become, secures assuredly certain spiritual results, which can be secured only through them; and, as a further extension of this system, that they are effectual only when they are pronounced by the quali-

fied persons, the priests. It is obvious that this formal magic presupposes the previous stage of informal magic in the community in which it arises, but it may persist when a large amount of spirituality has come to quicken its devotees; though its tendency is almost necessarily to stifle it. It is of formal magic that I speak in the sequel.

It would be very interesting to trace this element in the various religions of the world, but I can refer to only one or two, and only to those aspects of them that may give us some practical help in determining present-day questions.

There is only one religion, in so far as I know, which is quite free from magic in its formal sense, and that is the Mohammedan. At the same time it recognises magic as an element in life. Mohammed brought his faith into a land given over to idolatry and magic. His message was one against idolatry, with which he waged uncompromising war. He

taught a strong but barren monotheism, a morality which, if lax, was yet an improvement on what he found, and a ritual equally open to all. Mohammedanism brings every believer directly in face of Allah, and inculcates no ceremony which may not be performed equally by all. There is no priesthood, and consequently no room for the formal magic to which that opens the door. But magic in the ordinary sphere of life is recognised. There is no reference to magic in the Koran, so far as I remember, except an obscure allusion in the second last Sura. Commentators say that this Sura was revealed to Mohammed by God as an antidote to a spell prepared by a Jewish woman, from which he was suffering. There is here a reference to magic as something real, and the giving of a counter charm. The references to the Jinns which play so important a part in Arabian magic are also very few, only two I think; but they recognise them as real beings. One of these passages declares that some of

these spirits had been converted to faith in Mohammed.[1]

We have a mirror of the Mohammedan belief regarding magic in the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. These tales are saturated with belief in magic, in its strictest sense. The Jinns come in as agents bound to do the behests of mortals, who by skill or luck have found the spell that binds them. But this in no way trenches on the divine prerogative of Allah. These Jinns are believers or unbelievers, confess Allah and his prophet, or deny them; and the use of their services is no more inconsistent with religion than the use of the services of human slaves, faithful or infidel. The attitude of Mohammedanism with regard to magic is very much that of Christianity with regard to science. It leaves magic to work out its spells, and asserts a serene authority in matters of faith and practice, in which it requires obedience from magicians as well as from others.

[1] Sura, lxxii.

But, on the other hand, informal magic has spread through the whole of Islam, and paralysed its spiritual power. The prescribed form of worship is repeating prayers from the Koran. These are repeated in the original Arabic, which, in most of the countries where Mohammedanism has spread, is an unknown tongue. The mere repeating of the proper sounds is considered true prayer, and a sure means of winning heaven.

In another religion of the East, Hinduism, we find more analogies to the spread of magic in the Christian Church. We can trace the process of a spiritual religion being transmuted into a magical one.

The Rig Veda is the oldest monument which we have of the religion of India; and in it we have that religion in its most spiritual aspect. It is composed mainly of Mantras. Give attention to this word Mantra, for its history is the history of the intrusion of magic into religion. The Mantras of the Rig Veda are

psalms or prayer-hymns. In them we find conceptions of God, defective and false: there is in them belief in a plurality of gods, and the character assigned to some of them is very far from pure. But many of the hymns addressed to some one of these gods might have the name of the one God substituted without any sense of incongruity. Religion on the human side is fully expressed by men who have felt the reality of the spiritual conflict—the power of sin, the need of forgiveness, the yearning after God, and the sense of His succour, all addressed to the God invoked, without the idea of any intermediary.

Following the Rig Veda come two other Vedas, called the Yajur and the Sama Veda. They may be described as rearrangements of Mantras from the Rig Veda with some others added. The arrangement in their case is liturgical, and forms part of the ritual of sacrifice, which in the sub-Vedic age was the chief feature of Brahmanical worship. The magical element is not so discernible in them

by themselves, as it is in the commentary and in the rubric of sacrifice accompanying them. The idea of sacrifice even among the heathen was not necessarily magical. In the prayer of Chryses, the priest of Apollo, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, calling on the god to avenge him, and pleading the number of bullocks he had sacrificed on his altar, we have a gross anthropomorphism, but also a distinct spirituality, which cannot conceive of the god being moved in any other way than is a free earthly patron. The idea of sacrifice in earliest Vedic times seems to have been much the same. But in later times it was considered to have the inherent power of securing the benefits sought, whether temporal prosperity or remission of sins. Consequently the Brahman who offered it was considered to have some of the power of the gods, compelling them to grant the boons he desired.

One development at this period is noteworthy from a parallel in the Christian Church —the belief that the Deity was constrained to be present in the sacrifice. The first trace of

an Avatar or Incarnation which we find in India is incarnation in sacrifice, a magical incarnation. At the consecratory prayer of the priest the sacrifice became a god, as at the consecratory prayer of the priest in celebrating the Eucharist in the Roman Church, the bread is declared to be changed into the body of Christ. The Brahmanical doctrine, however, is presented with a refinement and spiritual subtlety that contrast favourably with the Roman teaching. The following is the fullest exposition of the subject—"Prajapati (Lord of men, a name of Brahma) is this sacrifice. Prajapati is both of these two things, uttered and unuttered, finite and infinite. What the priest does with the Yajus text, with that he consecrates the form of Prajapati which is uttered and finite, and what he does silently, with that he consecrates the form of Prajapati which is unuttered and infinite."[1] It will be observed that the idea here is that the outer sacrifice is the

[1] See Muir's *Sanscrit Text*, vol. v. p. 393. Also *Hinduism and Christianity* of Author, p. 30, 2nd ed.

symbol of a transcendental sacrifice which is being offered of the god himself. This seems a fine piece of mysticism, but its practical effect was to make the god subject to the priest.

The latest of the four Vedas is the Atharvan Veda, latest at all events in its present form, though some of the oldest Mantras are found in it alone. It is sometimes spoken of as a spurious Veda, and as being entirely different from the other Vedas. But the difference consists merely in the magic element being developed till it has come to dominate the whole. We see in it the old Vedic Mantra being transformed into the modern Hindu Mantra, the prayer being transformed into the spell. The Mantras are there in their original form, but with a slight change which transforms them from being prayer-hymns into incantations or charms. There are some for every stage of life—to secure success, to avert evil, to blight a foe, or to ward off his attack. They have not the form of prayers to the gods, but of commands to the blessings or curses invoked

to accomplish their work. They are not precative but imperative.[1] Some of the most beautiful hymns of Vedic literature have a verse or two added, which change them into a spell to work out some end not even suggested by the hymn itself.

When we come to modern Hinduism we find the Mantra supreme; but the idea of hymn or prayer is absolutely forgotten, and that of spell or charm alone remains. Many of these Mantras are portions of the Vedas, whose language has become obsolete and incomprehensible even to ordinary Sanscrit scholars. They are repeated with wonderful vocal exactness, but without any idea that they have, or ever had, any meaning that could be apprehended by mortals. Other Mantras are short forms in Sanscrit, generally a form of salutation to one of the gods. It is the special privilege of the Brahmans to use these Mantras, though some of an inferior kind may be communicated to the other castes. "The gods are subject to

[1] See *infra*, p. 81.

the Mantras, and the Mantras are subject to the Brahmans"—such is the creed of modern Hinduism. By the Mantra everything is consecrated. An idol is a mere piece of wood or stone till the Brahman pronounces the requisite Mantra; and then it becomes a god to be worshipped. A temple is mere stone and lime till the Brahman pronounces the requisite Mantra, and then it becomes a holy place. When *pinds* or lights for the dead are burned, a Mantra is pronounced over them, to make them efficacious in helping the dead on another stage towards final emancipation. So in almost everything we find the Mantra playing a part. Rites for harming human life and for saving it, for destroying or preserving cattle, for all the ends for which sorcery is generally used, are found in India, and in all of them the efficient agent is the Mantra. In India, more than anywhere else, we see the fact brought out that witchcraft and priestcraft are fundamentally the same thing, the difference being in the field of their operation.

One point is worthy of notice in view of its contrast with the magical ideas that have found a place within the Christian Church, namely, that all the power is supposed to be in the power of the spell itself, not in the purpose of the person pronouncing it. If he is a master of the spell, then, even if he pronounces it without any purpose, it cannot but do its work, as the seed dropped into the ground cannot but sprout, and by no power can he recall it.

Before looking at how magic has affected the teaching of the Churches of Christendom, let us look at the position of the Old Testament on this question. There can be no doubt that the prophets denounced all teaching that would sanction the idea of Jehovah being bound by spells. But does not their doing so point to the fact that the temple worship and ritual sanctioned the idea? I do not think that this inference can be drawn. The denunciations of the prophets are rather against that informal magic which, we have

seen, is apt to invade the purest religion. Take two of the most important elements in the ritual, the sacrifices and the priests. There was never any thought that the sacrifices were anything but the animals sacrificed, and they were sacrificed only as an act of worship required by God. Then, in the case of the priesthood, there was nothing in the act of consecration to signify that the man was thereby made fit to be a priest. That depended on his being of Aaronic descent. It was not till the great schism took place that Jeroboam consecrated those who were not otherwise qualified. It is well to notice that in the old Economy, consecration or ordination was recognition of fitness, and only in schism was it considered to confer fitness.

Coming now to Christianity, we find that magic has invaded it to a great extent. We see this most clearly in the Roman Catholic Church. And here I have time to deal only with the doctrine of the Sacraments. We know

how simple and how few these were as instituted by our Lord. We see how in the hands of the priesthood they have suffered a transformation as great as the Mantras of the Vedas have in the hands of the Brahmans. In the Roman Church we have an infinitely loftier theology and an infinitely purer morality than in Hinduism (those of the Bible), but also a more absolute magic; and the very loftiness of the theology and purity of the morality only make more terrible the magic which dominates them.

Three of the Sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders—affect the work of the Holy Spirit. In Hinduism there is nothing analogous to them. The doctrine of heredity takes their place. In Hinduism a man becomes a Hindu by birth; in Christianity a man becomes a Christian by the second birth, that of the water and the Spirit. Romanism teaches that this is imparted by Baptism, that when the water is sprinkled and the words of the formula pronounced, even though it be by an infidel, provided the intention be to baptize, the subject

is born again and cannot but be born again of the Spirit, so that he has now a new character, and can never again be the same as he was before.

In Hinduism a man becomes a priest or Brahman by birth; in Christianity a man can become a fit minister of religion only by the enduement of the Holy Spirit. The teaching of the Roman Church is that this enduement is conferred by the Sacrament of Orders. I do not discuss this meanwhile, as I shall return to it again, but simply point out that the Sacrament is essentially magical. The Holy Spirit is not free to endue the man or not as may seem good to Him, but is so subject to the word of the Bishop that He cannot but do so.

In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Roman doctrine touches the person and work of Christ. It teaches that there is here a work done such as is done in none of the other Sacraments: a work done on the Sacrament itself, and not merely on those to whom it is administered. It declares that, by the word of the priest, the whole substance of the bread and of the wine

is changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, so that the body that was born at Bethlehem, that died on the cross, that rose and is now at the right hand of God, is there under the appearance of bread and of wine, and the bread and the wine are there in appearance only. It will be seen that this is analogous to the ancient Vedic doctrine that the god was present in the sacrifice. It is also analogous to the modern Hindu idea of a charm changing a piece of matter into a god or idol. Before the priest pronounces the word of consecration the wafer is merely bread; after it is pronounced, it is God, worthy of the highest worship. It was this that led a travelled Hindu to declare that nowhere in India had he seen such gross idolatry as in the celebration of the Mass in a Christian temple. We have certainly magic of the most daring kind, making the glorified body of Jesus Christ subject to the word of a priest.

The sacrifice of the Mass, which is part of this Sacrament, touches the atoning work of

Christ. By the offering of it, propitiation is made for the sins of the living and of the dead. Souls suffering in Purgatory may, by frequent repetitions of the Mass, paid for by the piety of the living, be delivered from it, and released into the joys of Paradise. In this we have the analogy of the Hindu custom of burning *pinds*, or sacrifices for the dead, magic claiming power over the world to come as well as over this.

The Sacrament of Penance touches the prerogative of the Father. With the conditions of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, I have nothing to do. The point is, that even with these, the penitent cannot have his sins forgiven without the absolution of the priest; and so the Divine Father cannot of His own free grace forgive the penitent who turns to Him.

I do not dwell on the other Sacraments. From what I have brought forward we can see the position of Romanism. As the Hindus say, "The gods are subject to the Mantras and the Mantras are subject to the Brahmans": so the Roman Church teaches practically that *The*

Trinity is subject to the Sacraments and the Sacraments are subject to the priests. Both are equally magical: both bring the object of faith under the spell of man.

There is one point in which Roman magic is more absolute than Hindu magic, and that is in the doctrine of "intention." According to Hindu belief, as we have seen, a Mantra, when once spoken, cannot but work out its effect. According to the Council of Trent a Sacrament is not valid, and can have no effect, unless the officiating priest really means what he says. This removes the efficacy from the Sacrament itself to the intention of the priest. How much more absolute this makes the magic we can see from analogous examples. If a man were unintentionally to drop a seed of corn into good soil, it would spring up because it has a God-given vitality, which would cause it to do so. But if the will or intention of the sower were also necessary to make it spring up, it is obvious that his will would dominate the Divine work in the seed.

The words of Holy Scripture even casually spoken may find a lodgment in the heart of one who hears, and be the means of converting him. Such cases are well known to those who have studied the history of conversions. If the intention of the speaker were necessary, the action of the Spirit on the word would in such a case be vain. A Sacrament may, we believe, feed the faith of anyone who partakes of it in faith, even if the minister be indifferent, though this would be a great hindrance; but to make it entirely dependent on him is to make the grace of God dependent on the will of man.

It is obvious that one result of this doctrine is to make it uncertain whether the Sacrament has ever been truly administered. There may have been failure of intention on the part of the priest, and the Sacrament may have been consequently invalidated. It is only in dealing with one Sacrament, that of Penance, that the Council of Trent takes this into account. What a Roman Catholic is to do who may

suspect that intention was wanting on the part of the priest who baptized him, and that consequently he is not truly baptized; or that it was wanting on the part of the priest who performed Mass, and that consequently the Sacrament was a mockery, the Council says nothing. But when it comes to Penance or Absolution, it recognises this possibility. Even a priest who is held in deadly sin may pronounce the absolution, and it will be real if he really means it; but if a priest pronounce absolution without meaning it, there is no real absolution. If a penitent suspects that the priest has absolved him in jest, his only remedy is—not to believe that God will absolve him notwithstanding the failure of the priest—but the very fatuous one of seeking out a priest who will absolve him in earnest. The only security he can have that his sins are forgiven is the intention of the priest, and his own power of knowing the intention of the priest. To such a low depth will magic, when it intrudes into religion, bring even the highest of its teaching.

Let us now revert to the Sacrament of Orders, as it is called, as it will bring us to the bearing which all that we have been considering has on your purpose of entering the holy ministry. We have seen that the Roman doctrine is, that when a priest is consecrated by the laying on of the hands and the pronouncing of the words by the Bishop, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"—the Holy Ghost is actually conferred, and the character of the man so changed, that he becomes a priest, and cannot again become a layman. The ceremony is essentially magical: the Holy Spirit is not free to endue the man or not as may seem good to Him, but is so subject to the word of the Bishop, that He cannot but do so. It is only a corollary from this that the consecration must be performed, and the power conferred by one who is himself endowed with it. Hence it is taught, that for valid orders, it is needful to have an unbroken succession of ordained men, who have ordained their successors with due

form. Granting the magical premises, this of course follows. But when we remember that according to Roman doctrine, not only the requisite form, but also the true intention on the part of those who officiate, is always necessary for valid ordination, we can have no certain guarantee that the succession has been preserved unbroken. And even resting on the form itself may produce disastrous consequences for those who rely on it, as we shall presently see.

In the Anglican Church the forms of Ordination are much the same as in the Roman Church. So similar are they that many of its adherents contend that they are practically identical, and confer the same powers on those who are ordained. But the preface to the Ordinal, if it is to be allowed any weight, seems to me to forbid this. It declares that no man may exercise any of the functions of any of the Orders, "Except he were first called, tried, examined, and

known to have such qualities as are requisite for the same; and also by public prayer and imposition of hands, approved and admitted thereto by lawful authority." This pretty clearly limits the act of ordination to "approving and admitting" one already known to be fit; it does not extend to conferring fitness on him. In the opinion of Roman Catholics this makes the character of the Orders in the two Churches quite different. In their language the Roman Sacrament is "gratum faciens," endowing with grace, the Anglican, "gratis datum"—given to those endowed with grace. The Roman ritual is "imperative," the Anglican is "precative."[1]

This is a distinction which, we would think, the Anglican Church might bind as a crown of glory on its head, but it is repudiated by a large section of its clergy, who

[1] The Archbishops in their reply to the Pope refer to these two words as if the distinction were immaterial (p. 29), whereas they cover the whole distinction between magic and spirituality, whether the Church of England teaches that God is Lord, or the priest Lord.

wish it to be established that their Orders are the same as those of the Roman Church. The question came to an issue about three years ago, in consequence of a strong desire expressed by members of the Church of England, whose chief spokesman was Lord Halifax, to have Anglican Orders recognised by the Pope, as a step to the reunion of Christendom.

The Pope replied by a Bull, declaring that "Ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been, and are, absolutely null and utterly void." It is well to notice the grounds on which he does so. The mere schism from Rome has nothing to do with them. The grounds are first: that the aim of the Anglican ritual is not to consecrate a priest to offer sacrifice, seeing that the Anglican Church does not recognise a Eucharistic sacrifice; and second, that the form is defective; for, though the words "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" are pronounced, yet for a hundred and fifty years there was no definition of the

purpose for which the Holy Ghost was given. Though words to this effect were ultimately added to the ritual, yet the power of transmitting grace had been lost. The Pope also examines the intention of those who compiled the Ordinal, and has little difficulty in showing that they had an intention quite different from that of the Roman Church.

Lord Halifax met this cruel rebuff with a true Protestant spirit, though he might not own it to be such. He set his own spiritual experience against the Papal Bull, and refused to set the verdict of the Pope above the witness of the Spirit. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York answered the Bull in an address more distinguished for its erudition than for its conclusiveness. Instead of taking the strong position, which the Ordinal entitled them to do, that the essential for Orders was the enduement of the Spirit, and that ordination was merely recognising and admitting to office in the Church one so endued, by a form which it was quite within

the province of the Church to change as might seem to be needful, they try to show that there is no fundamental difference between the two rites. They maintain that the purpose of the Anglican priesthood is to offer sacrifice, but in defining sacrifice, when they come to the vital point, they say—"Too precise definitions of the manner of the sacrifice, or of the relation which unites the sacrifice of the Eternal Priest and the sacrifice of the Church, which in some way are certainly one, ought in our opinion to be avoided rather than pressed into prominence."[1] This is avoiding meeting the Pope's contention, that, according to the Anglican rite, no sacrifice is offered up in the Eucharist, or rather it is conceding it.

On the question of the form, their reply is practically a *tu quoque*. They allow a change in the form, but claim that the Anglican Church has gone back on older forms than those of the Roman Church, that

[1] P. 20.

changes have taken place in the latter, and if the Orders of the Anglican Church are thereby invalidated, so must those of the Roman Church be. This shows the disaster which dependence on mere form brings those who trust in it. Where is the security that the forms are valid? The High Anglican can prove the validity of his Orders only by showing that those of the Roman Church must be equally invalid. From the point of view of a student of comparative religion the controversy comes to this: that the Pope maintains that the Anglican Orders are invalid because they are not magical, while the Archbishops maintain that they are in a certain sense magical and therefore valid.[1]

What the result of the present agitation may be we cannot forecast, but we must hope that it will be to purge the Church of England of all trace of magic. If magic be

[1] Some who have dealt with the subject speak of the Roman and High Anglican theory of ordination as mechanical. This is quite to misunderstand what is considered essential in it. But magical it certainly is.

eliminated from sacerdotalism and sacramentarianism, what is left will be harmless enough. It is not a question of Protestantism or Romanism. The question is whether the Church of England is to range itself with the spiritual communions, or with the magical communions of Christendom; whether it is to be a Church which, recognising the Holy Spirit to be sovereign and free, seeks by watching and prayer to cherish His presence with her; or a Church which, believing the Holy Spirit to be subject to her "imperative" forms, has only to employ them to secure His power in those whom she wills to have them.

Let me here caution you against inferring from what I have said, that there can be no true ministry where these rites are employed. Just because we believe the Divine Spirit to be sovereign and free, we believe that He may not be hindered by these forms any more than He may be commanded by them. The records of all the Churches show that ministries

of real spiritual power have been exercised by some who have sought authorisation for their ministry through these rites. The Spirit will sustain the earnest servant, even though he may have been mistaken in the way in which he sought Him. All that we maintain is that these rites do not secure what they claim to secure, that their tendency is rather to hinder than to favour the presence of the Spirit, and that they tend to mental and moral deterioration.

This is seen in the narrowness of vision, and consequent arrogance generated in those who believe in them. They are unable to see the Church of Christ beyond the horizon of their own magical circle, and regard all in that position as heathen or unbelievers. It is seen also in the tendency to duplicity and untruthfulness, in matters of religion at all events, so manifest on the part of many who trust in these forms as essential. Magic is always allied with cunning and deceit, and in religion, when magical sanctions are considered para-

mount to moral sanctions, we need not be surprised that little heed is paid to the latter. If you wish to get an illustration of what I mean, read the *Secret History of the Oxford Movement*, which shows how even such a man as the late Cardinal Newman thought himself justified in matters of religion in resorting to duplicity and falsehood, such as would have ruined his character in civil or mercantile life.

And now, in conclusion, let me say a word as to the bearing of what I have been saying, on your present position and prospects, as students of theology, looking forward to the Christian ministry. I daresay you will be thinking that I have been leading you rather far afield. But as ministers of religion, the wider your knowledge of the attitude of men towards religion, the better will you be able to understand the attitude of many of those among whom you may be called to labour; the wider your knowledge of the position claimed by ministers of religion in all faiths,

the better will you be able to realise the position which you must take, and the strength in which you must fill it. You may marvel how magical ideas should have such a hold on the religions of mankind, how even the Christian religion should seem almost impotent to shake itself free from their baneful grasp. But when you come to discharge the duties of your office, you will meet much that explains it. You will find, for instance, parents of an infant that seems likely to die, eager to have baptism administered to it before its breath departs, as though that were needful to its being received in the heavenly land by Him who has said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." You will find persons anxious to have the minister to come to "put up a prayer" by the bedside of a person who is in mortal sickness, as though that were sufficient, without any spiritual change on the part of the dying man. You will find the magical sentiment, the disposition to trust in magic, in the power of a charm, or in the word of an accredited person,

inherent in human nature. And the more careless the life may have been, the stronger will this disposition be, when once anxiety about the soul's welfare may have taken hold on it. At such a time you might wish that you had power in your own hands to respond, that you had an enduement which would enable you to bestow the assurance they desired, without having to refer them directly to God as the only one who can bestow it. You may realise, then, something of the fascination which priestly power has for some minds, and also of the pride which it induces.

But our study should also lead you to rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. The only priesthood in which we believe is the priesthood of all believers, anointed by the Spirit to offer spiritual sacrifices. Efforts have been made by some Presbyterians to prove the validity of their Orders by tracing their Apostolic descent through the clergy who left the Roman Church at the time of the Reformation. On the principle of meeting

opponents on their own ground, such a course is allowable. But I do not suppose there is one minister in the Presbyterian Church who would consider his ordination invalidated if one, or a dozen, links in the chain were found to be wanting. Behind the question of the validity of Orders is that of the nature of Orders. If they are magical, unbroken succession may be needful for their validity; if they are spiritual, their validity depends not on transmission from the past, but on the spiritual power of the present. The basis of Orders in the Presbyterian Church is the power of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, to recognise the needful ministerial gifts in him who is to be ordained, to call him to the office, and to give him the authority of the Church to exercise those gifts with which the Spirit has endued him. You are looking forward as the goal of your present course to be ordained as ministers of the New Testament, to rule and to teach in the Church of God. For this you need to be endued with the Holy Spirit. But it is not

in the power of the Church to confer on you that Spirit. All that it can do is to recognise in you the Spirit which God has given you, and call you and set you apart for the office for which the Spirit has equipped you. I trust none of you are looking forward to your ordination to give you any spiritual power which you do not possess. If so, you are looking for what no ordination can give, and what Presbyterian ordination does not profess to give. I trust that you are conscious of the call and the enduement of the Spirit now, and are going forward to fill His behests. If you are not, you are on the wrong track, and can expect no blessing in your future career for yourself or others. If you are, you will find in that consciousness the highest incitement to spare no effort in study and in work, that you may bring a fully-equipped manhood to the high service to which the Spirit has called you. And when the realisation of your hopes, the reward of your labours, does come, and the Church calls you and ordains you to the

ministry, you will see in it God's people owning God's work in you, and giving you their authority to be God's minister to them; and you may trust that the same Spirit who is guiding you now will continue to bless you in the great work to which He calls you.

And now, my young friends, in closing, I bid you farewell. I cannot do so as former Moderators have done, expressing the hope that those of you who have completed your course may soon find spheres of work in connection with the United Presbyterian Church, and that the rest of you will return to complete your course in this Hall. Those of you who have finished will, I trust, soon find spheres of labour in the home or foreign field; but it will not be in connection with the United Presbyterian Church, but with the larger Church which it will help to form. The rest of you will, I trust, return to your studies; but it will not be in this Hall under the same professors,

but in other Halls, in which you will meet some of your former professors, along with others new to you as teachers, though well known to you by reputation.

I bid farewell not only to you, but also, in the name of the United Presbyterian Church, I bid farewell to her Theological Hall. And, even with all the hopes that lie beyond, there cannot but be a sense of pathos and sadness in doing so. It recalls all that our Church owes to her Hall. The witness to that is in the able ministry that has issued from it, in the efficiency of the congregations under their charge, and in the work that is being done through them for the maintenance and spread of the Kingdom of God. Fifty-three years have elapsed since, by the union of the Secession and Relief Halls, that of the United Presbyterian Church was formed. In its earlier years the names of John Brown and John Eadie made it known throughout Protestant Christendom, while the less widely known but not less sterling qualities of James Harper, Neil MacMichael,

and William Lindsay were appreciated by all who had the privilege of studying under them. Its later years have been illustrated by the names of John Cairns, John Ker, and David Duff, to say nothing of those who are still its ornaments. You, my young friends, have great privileges to be grateful for, you have an honourable tradition to maintain. I trust that in the United Halls the students of this Hall will be marked men for earnestness and scholarship. I trust that in the United Church, the ministers who have studied at this Hall will be noted for the zeal and success of their ministry, and that through them its memory and influence will be preserved in Scotland for many years to come.

And to you, also, honoured Principal and Professors, I have to bid farewell. In doing so I would acknowledge the debt which the United Presbyterian Church owes you, sympathise with you in the breaking up of a Senatus in which there has been such cordial co-operation, and in a College in which so much

fruitful work has been done; and express the hope and the prayer that in the new spheres on which you will soon enter the same blessing which has attended you here may still rest in greater fulness on you and on those with whom you will be associated, enabling you to train up a well-equipped, spiritual ministry, that shall make the United Church a power for righteousness, for charity, for truth, for progress, for all that the Kingdom of Heaven brings with it, such as this land has not hitherto seen.

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